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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LAGOS TRIAL CENSUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF  
NATIONAL ID CARDS

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Trial Census Shows Imperfections in Enumeration Process  
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11. (U) A trial census conducted in select local governments between August 29 and September 2 revealed imperfections in the GON's national population census process. In Lagos, the exercise was held during the work week in six local governments. While the State government did a good job of getting the word out, residents mostly ignored the exercise and left home to go to work before the census enumerators could count them. Enumerators spent hours trying to call back residents to be counted. Past censuses were scheduled on weekends and nationwide directives were issued to ensure that people stayed at home. While some sources in the Southwest and other areas claimed success, many residents claimed that enumerators were not present. Septel Abuja discusses other areas of the country.

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National Identity card: flawed collection system  
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12. (U) At the same time, the GON is introducing a national ID card. Provisions for distribution of the card were flawed; its use as a population enumeration tool will be questionable at best. Card collection began in Lagos on August 15, where citizens were required to collect the cards at local government offices. Lagos state offices are fewer than needed and understaffed, and so crowds outside were generally large and fidgety. To make matters worse, the Lagos State governor declared that people without the cards would not be able to access certain social services or perform certain transactions in the state. Many were therefore bent on getting their cards right away.

15. (U) A recent scene at the Lagos Mainland local government office provides a good snapshot of what is happening throughout southern Nigeria. Two officers sat at a table, crowded with people, and searched through endless piles of ID cards. The process was laborious. People shoved and pushed. The noise level was distractingly high. "Workers have generally been slow in responding to the call to collect," admitted one of the local government officials. He claimed some white-collar workers who went to his Oshodi local government center either left frustrated or tried to arrange alternate methods of collection, including group pick-up for corporations.

16. (U) Comment: In February 2003, when the GON began registering people for national ID cards, senior officials, including a Federal Minister, were indicted for tinkering with the process. If the GON intends to implement useful procedures for counting its population, it will have to plan and coordinate efforts much better. Already, mechanisms put in place to update census data are untested and of dubious reliability. End comment.

Browne